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## **Cultivating Ubuntu: Organizing to unleash strategic foresight in practice**

### **Abstract**

Strategic foresight is crucial in today's fast moving business environment. As an organizing capability that enable organizations to transgress established boundaries to create and capture of opportunities otherwise overlooked by competitors', it is consistently ranked as a dominant logic in contemporary organizing. However, organizing episodic corporate foresight exercises is not enough to cultivate strategic foresight among employees- especially when the business environment already characterised by uncertainties and ambiguities is in constant flux of transformation. To help address this situation, we integrate ideas from the African humanistic philosophy of *Ubuntu* with established approaches to cultivating strategic foresight, and suggest ways of organizing that has the potential to unleash the strategic foresight potential of employees, especially those embedded in the lower levels of organizational hierarchies. We then explore how Ubuntu as a transient organizing philosophy could enhance relational pluralism in project teams, and in turn encourage employees to think the unthinkable, and enact organizationally useful actions in their situated practice. **Keywords:** Organizing structures, project managers, project teams, relational incumbency, strategic foresight, Ubuntu

### **Introduction**

Broadly conceived as the ability to identify and (re)configure sources of potentialities and limits into productive outcomes, the concept of strategic foresight has become an important area of management studies. The current obsession with the concept points to the derived theoretical implications of various conceptual as well as empirical studies (e.g. Chia, 2008; Cunha, 2004), which argue that strategic foresight as an organizing capability could lead to desirable outcomes such as ambidexterity, entrepreneurship, and innovation. While some

legitimate efforts has been made in developing recipes for organizations on how to harness their strategic foresight potential (Chia, 2008; Andriopoulos and Gotsi, 2006; Constanzo, 2004), it is becoming evident that novel ways of shoring up the strategic foresight capabilities of organizations is needed taking into consideration the emergence of new forms of organizing in contexts of greater complexity, uncertainty, and rapid evolutionary changes in the business environment.

Despite the past scholarly accomplishments, studies have failed to explore how indigenous concepts from the developing world that further enrich our understanding of the concept (Walumbwa, Avolio & Aryee, 2011; Nkomo, 2011). This study seeks to fill this void by exploring the idea that integration of the African humanistic philosophy of *Ubuntu* in everyday organising could help organizations to develop their strategic foresight potential. Our purpose in this paper, therefore, is to draw on ideas from the Ubuntu ‘ways of knowing’ to explore new ways of managing the adaptive formal and informal emergent structures that embodies and govern the situated practices and organizing relationships in ways that could lead to the cultivation of strategic foresight in practice. The Ubuntu perspective, as advanced in this paper, makes no attempt to replace or invalidate the two perspectives on strategic foresight; rather, it complements them by seeking to cumulatively enrich our understanding of how strategic foresight as a distributed capability could be harnessed in practice.

The study contributes to the literature on strategic foresight in the following ways: First, while prior research has identified organizing practices as contributing to the development of strategic foresight, this paper draws on the Ubuntu philosophy as a meta-theoretical lens to extend our understanding of strategic foresight as a distributed capability that could be employed to harness the strategic foresight potential of organizations embedded in high velocity environments. Second, we draw on the organizing logics of Ubuntu to develop an activity-capability profile of project leaders which we believe could open up possibilities for

rethinking how project managers, for example could lighten the imagination of their team members and mobilize their effort towards an idealized future.

The paper is structured as follows: First we present the two competing view on strategic foresight and then consider the nature of Ubuntu in contemporary organizing. Next, we explore the theoretical aspects of strategic foresight and its cultivation in practice. Following this we articulate the rationale and logics of the Ubuntu humanistic philosophy, and go further to develop a transient model to show how Ubuntu could enhance relational pluralism and in turn the enactment of strategic foresight in project teams. We then go on to develop an activity-capability profile of project team leaders that support the development of Ubuntu organizing in practice. We then conclude the paper with some directions for future research.

### **Two competing perspectives on strategic foresight, and the Ubuntu concept**

Our position is developed in relation to the literature on strategic foresight which suggests two competing perspectives on the cultivation of strategic foresight. The dominant perspective conceptualizes strategic foresight as a by-product of episodic ultra-rational corporate futures exercises. This view is supported by the proliferation of well-planned corporate foresight methodologies which follow linear and clearly defined structures, and often facilitated by external management consultants (Rohrbeck, 2012; von der Gracht et al., 2010; Hines and Bishop, 2006 ).

On the other hand, the case has also been made that strategic foresight emerges as an ongoing social practice whose routines and activities are enacted on an everyday basis, sometimes with very little reflection, from an unintended action to an unintended outcome in the moment. Arguing for flexibility rather than structure, recurrent theory in contrast to the episodic paradigm has highlighted the process nature of strategic foresight by delineating strategic foresight as a bundle of everyday organizing activities that enable organizations to creatively

evaluate and (re)configure sources of potentialities into future resources and productive outcomes (Sarpong et al., 2013; Chia, 2008). Organizational efforts to reconcile the demand for structure by the interventionist paradigm and the flexibility advocated by the latter, has added to the complexity of strategic foresight been treated by managers as an application of theory, rather than a value-creating activity.

### **The concept of ubuntu in contemporary organizing**

The claim advanced by this paper is as follows: Ubuntu's emphasis on 'otherness' and relational pluralism in particular, could serve as a starting point to unleash the strategic foresight potential of organizations in identifying opportunities for innovation (Sarpong and Maclean, 2011) in complex and fast changing environments. Ubuntu, a literal translation of the Xhosa expression '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' means a person is a person through other persons (Karsten and Illa, 2005; Mbigi and Maree, 1995). The notion of ubuntu has developed to become not just an African virtue but a humanistic philosophy that prescribes individual and community behaviours and goals worth striving to achieve harmony, peace and reconciliation.

Following Van Vlaendren (2001:150), we conceptualised the philosophy as "the desire to live in harmony with others and to submit one's own needs for the benefit of the social framework in which one lives". Translated in contemporary organizing, the Ubuntu world view is generally understood in terms of employee participation, ethics, and teamwork. Amidst a globalised world characterized by mutually opposing shades of capitalism, the South African popular management literature (e.g. Broodryk, 2006; Mbigi and Maree, 1995) suggest that the incorporation of Ubuntu principles and practices in everyday organizing could lead to inclusivity, consensus building, productivity and a shared vision of the future.

Extending this notion, in this regard the value of the philosophy to management, the concept has been particularly leveraged in extending our understanding of leadership, relationship

management, and human resources development in South Africa and beyond. For Hanks (2008) the Ubuntu paradigm's emphasis on 'self in relation to others' represents a promising alternative to the utilized therapeutic modalities in psychoanalytic treatments. Lutz (2009) for example explored the interpretation of Ubuntu and its implication for ethics in global management preoccupied with stakeholder participation in decision making. Similarly, Mangaliso (2001) highlights how Ubuntu's emphasis on compassion and communality could contribute to firm's effort in building competitive advantage.

While the Ubuntu philosophy has led to some novel insight in general management, it is yet to receive some attention within the burgeoning literature on future studies, and the more recent emerging literature on strategic foresight. The absence of Ubuntu inspired ideas in the strategic foresight literature reflects the dominant conception of foresight as a trans-individual attribute or a managerial competence (Amstues, 2008; Major *et al.*, 2001). The recent turn to relationalism in accounting for foresightful actions (Sarpong *et al.*, 2014; Tsoukas and Shepherd, 2004), and the conceptualization of foresight as a distributed capability (Paliokaitė *et al.*, 2014) has brought some ubuntu related ideas to the centre of ongoing discourse in strategic management. For example, Cunha *et al.* (2004) argue that the everyday organizing practices and micro-interactions between organizational members are relevant for understanding the future and developing organizationally useful ways in dealing with organizational inertia.

For Sarpong and Maclean (2013), the mobilization of stakeholders' differential visions of yet-to-be-realized innovation is important for the successful creation of innovative products in hypercompetitive environments. In a more recent study, Sarpong and Maclean (2014) contributing to group activities concerned with foresight, examined how organizing relationships and taken-for-granted situated practices of organizational members positioned lower down the organizational hierarchy could potentially enable (or constrain) organizational

‘foresightfulness’. Acknowledging the fact that the link between cause and effect are often elusive, we firmly believe that Ubuntu as an organizing framework has the potential to unleash the strategic foresight potential of organizational members. We now turn our attention to established approaches to the cultivation of strategic foresight in practice.

### **Cultivating strategic foresight**

This section explores outline the established approaches to the cultivation of strategic foresight, and attempt to demonstrate why Ubuntu as an organizing framework could extend our understanding of the cultivation of strategic foresight. We note that the fast changing business environment characterised by complexity and uncertainty calls for the search for additional organizing frameworks that can inspire organizational members to enact foresightful actions in their situated practice.

The existing literature points to two dominant approaches to cultivating strategic foresight: The corporate foresight exercises approach, which treat strategic foresight as an outcome of ad hoc futures exercises, and the practice approach, which treats strategic foresight as a nexus of a bundle of everyday situated practices and activities. Contributing to the two established approaches to developing the strategic foresight potential of organizational members, we delineate the organizing dimension of Ubuntu and demonstrate how its analytical priority to human shared subjectivity and perspective taking could enhance the cultivation of strategic foresight in practice. The main elements of these approaches are summarised in Table 1.

**[Insert table 1 here]**

#### ***Corporate foresight exercises***

Corporate foresight exercises such as business war-gaming (Schwarz, 2009), scenario planning (van der Heijden, 1996) have been heralded as strategic intervention rituals that enable organizations broaden their vision, probe the future and navigate their business environments (Varum and Melo, 2010; Burt and Van der Heijden, 2008). Organized around a framework of scientific rationality, such exercises are frequently promoted and prescribed as rational ‘blue prints’ for organisations seeking to renew themselves, or better still a panacea for organizations facing strategic inertia. The upshot is that strategic foresight has become a derived outcome of corporate foresight exercises (Rohrbeck, 2012; Bezold, 2010; Bootz, 2010), and employees are said to potentially cultivate strategic foresight by actively engaging with these corporate foresight exercises periodically.

The preoccupation of these purposeful foresight exercises frequently facilitated by external management consultants is to get employees to ‘think the unthinkable’. Focusing tightly on the generation of plausible futures or heuristic narratives about technological trajectories, and emerging social and economic trends that are likely to shape the future, it lightens employees’ imagination and ability to spot developments before they become trends (Vecchiato, 2010; Chermack et al, 2007). The narratives are then used to develop compelling visions not so detached from the very world in which they are expected to play out (plausible) to help decision makers re-view their strategic thinking. The opportunity to systematically examine the organisation’s external and internal environment means the mental models and existing assumptions of organizational decision makers are challenged and they end up gaining an improved understanding of the structure of key forces driving change in their business environment (Chermack, 2004; Shoemaker, 1993).

The rapidly shifting business environment requires the cultivating and sustaining of strategic foresight at all times. In this context, the problem with the corporate foresight approach lies in its episodic approach to thinking in the organisation about the future (Cunha



*et al.*, 2006; Burt and Van der Heijden, 2003), and its reliance of external facilitators who may (un)purposefully direct employees attention to irrelevant features of social currents that have little impact on the future (Sarpong *et al.*, 2013a).

#### ***A ‘practice’ approach to cultivating strategic foresight***

The practice approach to cultivating strategic foresight has been necessitated by what can be described as impoverished theorizing on the creative emergence of strategic foresight and its cultivation in organizations without the help of the empowering consultant (Sarpong, 2011; Cunha *et al.*, 2006). Departing from “a technical–rationalistic episodic activity to a socially embedded process-based and permanent competence” (Cunha *et al.*, 2006: 951), strategic foresight in the form of strategizing is neither a process nor something that an organization has. Rather, it is something that employees do (Paliokaitė *et al.*, 2014). Following the contemporary turn to practices in social theory, this perspective suggest that the cultivation of strategic foresight relies on the interdependence of social agents confronted with the challenge of imputing meaningful orders upon their social order. Organizing practices and activities therefore serve as the site for the creative emergence of strategic foresight (Waehrens and Riis, 2010), and provide spaces for employees to identify and interpret limits and opportunities for value creation and capture within the contingency of organizing. Presenting strategic foresight as a contextual process of ‘way-finding’ (Sarpong *et al.*, 2013a), the cultivation of strategic foresight involves the actualization of a continuous process of constructive exploration and exploitation of newly imagined creative solutions to the opportunities and limits that uncertainties open up.

Within the practice paradigm, ‘peripheral vision’- the optimisation of organisational capabilities beyond the building of core competence to identifying, assessing, interpreting and acting on opportunities and threats emerging far beyond the theoretical boundaries of the firm

has also been mooted as a potential strategy to cultivating strategic foresight (Brown, 2004; Day and Schoemaker, 2004; Prahalad, 2004; Neugarten, 2003). For Chia (2008), the cultivation of peripheral vision can be approached elliptically by developing employees attention away from what he referred to as “the gestalt figures of comprehension to the unformed and seemingly invisible background against which figure, identity and meaning emerge” (Chia, 2008:27). Although there has been pioneering advances in practice-oriented foresight scholarship, researchers have focussed predominantly on theorizing the outcomes of strategic foresight at the expense of micro-foundations required to institutionalise strategic foresight in organizing. Perhaps owing to this focus, scholars (with exceptions of Sarpong et al, 2013b; Cunha et al, 2006) have overlooked the relevance of taken-for-granted organizing practices of employees in the cultivation and institutionalizing strategic foresight.

From a theoretical and empirical standpoint, it raises a potentially critical question: How can organizations unleash the incipient strategic foresight potential of their employees in ways that complement the two established approaches to cultivating strategic foresight? In our view, this question is important because it compels consideration of strategic foresight as a distributed capability. Second, it does not only prioritise a reversed causation (bottom-up) approach to cultivating strategic foresight, but also has the potential to extend our understanding on the creative emergence of strategic foresight in everyday organizing.

As a starting point, we follow Feldman (2003) to argue that employees frequently use their understanding on how their organization operate as a benchmark to guide their performances and actions in their situated practice. In this regard, understanding what constitutes Ubuntu is the first step to successfully integrating the philosophy into everyday organizing in ways that could unleash the incipient foresight potential of employees. In the next section we outline the organising dimensions of the Ubuntu humanistic philosophy.

### *The organizing dimension of Ubuntu*

In advancing the nature and rationale for our call on organizations to integrate Ubuntu into their organizing processes, we first outline the hallmarks of Ubuntu, one form of African humanistic philosophy that has come to gain so much traction not just in post-apartheid South African social discourse, but also in leadership studies, but one which unfortunately has not received explicit attention in the strategic foresight literature. As noted earlier Ubuntu as an African world view has been described as the ‘essence of human beings’ and embodies qualities such as compassion, care, kindness and empathy that holds communities together in their everyday struggles for a better life (Ikuenobe, 2006; Brack et al, 2003; Mnyandu, 1997).

Although it should be understood and examined as a complex and ambiguous Afrocentric philosophical thought system made up of beliefs, mythology, norms, values, and history (Mangaliso, 2002), Ubuntu is frequently described as a unifying African vision that acknowledges the particularities of others’ beliefs and cultures in ways that bring people together regardless of race, class, or wealth (Tambulasi and Kayuni, 2005). Emphasising its priority on human relations, Mangaliso (2001: 24) brings some management precision to the concept by defining it as “humanness—a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness—that individuals and groups display for one another”. Embedded in African traditions, institutions, and collective value systems, Mbigi (1997) identified survival, stewardship, solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity as the habitual dispositions, or enduring character traits that drive Ubuntu across space and time. These virtues which are shaped by social practices (McIntyre, 1981) give form and shape to the collective orientation of the philosophy, and its indigenous ‘ways of knowing’ is sustained through ongoing interactions between individuals and their communities. Thus, in unequivocal terms Ubuntu does not necessarily give ontological priority to ‘the individual and his psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually

present to one another' (Goffman, 1967: 2). In extending our understanding of the inarticulate social currents of the philosophy, and how it may bring to life possibilities and potentialities in the cultivation of strategic foresight, we delineate the organizing dimensions of Ubuntu around two specific lines of attention that gives form to a set of 'internal goods' if sustained and institutionalised. The first is the role of the individual as an agent, and her interactions and relationship with the community in which they are embedded. The second is one of relational pluralism and consensus building with others in decision making geared towards the pursuit of the good of the community.

According to an Ubuntu worldview, the individual as a social being cannot be separated from her community. In other words, an individual by virtue of her relationship with others has "a social commitment to share with others what he has....the ideal person will be judged in terms of his relationship with others" (Teffo, 1996:104). Thus, within this Ubuntu framework of thinking, the well-being of the community takes precedence over individuals' self-interests. Centred on a collective cognitive model, 'being-with-others' is to live in harmony with others by embracing the life, concerns, and anxieties of others. The relevance of Ubuntu's emphasis on the collective good was succinctly described by Archbishop Desmond Tutu when he aptly remarked that:

"...a person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are." (Tutu, 1999:31)

Underlying this ideal of exercising Ubuntu is the crucial need to discern, acknowledge and unconditionally respect individual similarities and differences. Respect commit people to dialogue, and create an atmosphere in which people could feel safe and free to express their

viewpoints and opinions in unexpurgated fashion. Crucial in cultivating this sense of respect is the proactive use of language which creates a sense of belonging, common welfare (Berkovich, 2014), and the acknowledgement of all viewpoints as meaningful irrespective of the messenger's position within the community's hierarchy (Mangaliso, 2002). Table 2 is a list of some popular embodied slogans or ethos frequently invoked to support the ideals of Ubuntu in everyday life.

Within this framework of community organizing, relational pluralism and consensus building gives form to Ubuntu as a complex, coherent form of living in harmony with others and working together to building idealized futures. Research on the relational dimension of Ubuntu (Udechukwu, 2014; Sigger et al, 2010; Mbigi, 1997) has focused on examining the adaptiveness of formal and emergent social structures that embodies and governs Ubuntu organizing relationships. Yet we know that traditional African societies are hierarchically arranged in such a way that community leaders are powerful, and have greater respect and status than ordinary folks, especially because age is frequently used to infer wisdom. This may give little room for individuals to express dissent, question authority, or challenge collective thinking during deliberations (Lutz, 2009).

Nevertheless, Louw (2006) observes that Ubuntu while placing emphasis hierarchy simultaneously encourages dissenting opinions. For him, status order during community discussions is very much unstable and that even though there is "a hierarchy of importance among speakers, every person gets an equal chance to speak up until some kind of an agreement, consensus or group cohesion is reached". In this regard, the ability of Ubuntu to provide spaces for polyphonic and subjugated voices to be heard during objective discourse then become akin to the Japanese notion of 'Ba' which prioritises individual and collective knowledge (Chia, 2003). Thus, Ubuntu requires community leaders to mobilize differential

polyocular visions, and inspire them towards an idealized shared vision of the future (Ncube, 2010).

Given that many organizations structure their work around projects (Kerzner, 2013; Whitley, 2006), and frequently rely on ubiquitous project teams to exploit their distributed expertise and limited organizational resources (Hecker, 2012; Cunha and Chia, 2007), we propose to develop the remainder of the paper by placing emphasis on project teams. We believe that such an organizing level where observable changes in the way work is done can be witnessed, could help us to demonstrate how specific dimensions of Ubuntu are likely to operate, and the extent to which they are likely to unleash the strategic foresight potential of employees. Below, we consider what can be learned from Ubuntu in everyday organizing to inspire project teams to ‘think the unthinkable’ in ways that could leverage their strategic foresight potential.

### **Ubuntu in practice: Unleashing strategic foresight**

Drawing parallels from Ubuntu, most project teams have their own explicit or implicit structures, and canonical rules that tend to define the positions assumed or enacted by its members in their everyday situated practice. The positions occupied by members within this social sphere of organizing, we argue, are often defined by experience, skills, function and responsibilities. Akin to the structural demands of Ubuntu, these normative organizing requirements, hierarchies and their associated titles determine the duties, tasks, and roles of project team members. More importantly, these collections of adaptive, formal, and informal responsibilities not only give form to positions which prescribe the roles and situated practices of organizational members (Terreberry, 1968); they also constitutively serve as reference points for the ascription of relational rights and account for the observed interrelations among team members in practice. From this perspective, project team leaders like Ubuntu elders for

example, have a responsibility for directing their teams organizing activities towards corporate objectives. They have more authority than persons occupying lower-ranking positions (Mechanic, 1962), and tend to inhabit a higher relational position within their teams structure.

On the other hand, team members whose responsibilities, roles and tasks are often determined by project leaders are embedded in the lower end of the organizing architecture. Following Mische (2009), we argue that the aspiration of team members is a function of their relative defined positions in the team. The non-physical matrix or ‘boundary surface’ (Smith, 2007) separating the relative location position of higher and lower participants within a given social field (Bourdieu, 1977), is hereafter referred to as the ‘social membrane’. This social membrane regulates the temporal migration of team members between the lower and upper relational levels, and the permeability of this membrane is determined by the organizing relationships and interactions regimes that can be found in a given project team.

Nevertheless, the fluid nature of organizing in itself frequently provides opportunities for lower participants to change ranks by temporarily moving from one relational position to another within a given organizing structure. In addition to the organizing regime, three factors may determine the possible temporal migration of a participant across the social membrane. These include the participant’s (a) credibility and narrative skills (b) accumulated experiential and knowledge, and (c) networking and social appropriation abilities. Although presented separately, these situated dispositions are somehow interdependent, and their constitutive strength could provide compelling insight into the potential temporal movement of a particular participant between different relational levels. We refer to this temporal and relational movement of actors within their social sphere of interaction space within a given organizing regime as ‘relational incumbency’.

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**Insert Figure 1 here**

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As displayed in Figure 1, the present analysis shows the temporal migration of actors (w1 and w2) from a lower to a higher relational position and vice versa. The sinusoidal (wave form) migration of members across the membrane reveals how, for example, a lower participant (w1) permanently embedded in the lower relational end of the organizing structure, may temporally move to a higher level to facilitate the discussion or evaluation of scenario narratives. When this lower participant temporarily moves up to the higher relational level, the high-ranking participant (w2), for example, simultaneously moves to occupy the lower position of the ordinary organization member. When the discussion is exhausted, the manager then automatically transitions to the higher level and the actor also moves back to occupy her position at the lower level. Also of a salience here is the observation by Weber (1963), who remarked that:

....in a free society the motives which induce people to work vary with...different social classes.....there is normally a graduated scale of motives by which men from different social classes are driven to work. When a man changes ranks, he switches from one motive to another.

Weber's observation is pertinent in illuminating the actions and doings of people whose location and position change within a given social structure. While concerned with social class, it brings to the fore issues related to identity, power, and thus the potential of team members to enact foresightful actions whenever they get the opportunity to temporarily change ranks. From this perspective, we argue that organizing practices and relationships that facilitate the free and temporary movements from one relational level or position to another may serve to encourage lower participants to articulate their images of the future, and take relevant actions aimed at improving their understanding of the cost, returns, efficiency and all requisite information



related to the stimulation of collective imagination and exploration of potential pathways into the future.

### **The ubuntu-minded project leader as a facilitator of strategic foresight**

Akin to team leaders who are frequently relied upon by their subordinates to use their skills, expertise, and experiential knowledge to mobilise members to get work done, seniors or older people are default leaders, nurturers and custodians of the Ubuntu philosophy and are expected to inculcate its values and virtues in the younger generation. From this pre-given ontological status, we conceptualise a typical project leader as a “[leader] who is forced to superficiality by fragmented, discontinuous events occurring throughout the organization; the manager who must be a master politician, master negotiator, expert psychologist and counsellor, expert communicator, and much more” (Introna, 1997: 22) in encouraging an Ubuntu mind-set among team members.

Form leadership standpoint, the Ubuntu philosophy places greater “emphasis on compassion, respect, human dignity, building relationships, personal interaction, and mutual respect” (Muchiri, 2011: 443; Browning, 2006). In this regard project leaders, conceptualized as ‘old people’ in an Ubuntu regime, we argue, have an integrative responsibility of ordering, directing, learning, and organising their project teams’ efforts in the exploration and exploitation of identified opportunities and limits within the contingency of organizing (see Figure 2). Below, we examine how the organizing logics of Ubuntu can facilitate may give form to the strategic role of the project leader in fostering strategic foresight in their teams.

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**Insert Figure 2 here**  
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### **Learning**

Positing strategic foresight as a proactive learning process established around continuous probing and social interactions in everyday work settings (Bootz, 2010), the ubuntu-minded

project leader will strive to create an environment that enables the development of a shared understanding among team members on what constitutes possibilities and limits in organizing. The ability of team members to learn to identify such limits and opportunities' requires the project leader to provide much-needed space for team members to harness their creative potential through experimentation and empowering them to reflect on their everyday practice.

In addition, team learning from a strategic foresight perspective is about the interpretation of equivocal cues, the integration of disparate ideas and the sharing of new knowledge (Bootz, 2010), hence an important role of the leader here is to encourage team members to share their thoughts freely even if they tend to challenge or question the team's own assumptions, frames and mental models. Providing a forum for members to register their thoughts may encourage members to share their ideas, fears, insights, anxieties and possible resentments about the way work is organised. In this way, learning is not only enabled, but in addition the team members move a step further to take responsibility for the project, get locked into the project vision, and do their best to find solutions to the problems they may encounter in their situated practice.

### **Ordering and directing**

The complexities of the interaction between project teams' technologies and market opportunities, for example may contribute to individuals having different and often conflicting views about reality. This implies that the invocation of scenario narratives and counter-narratives during 'foresightful' thinking can extend *ad infinitum* without the team reaching a consensus. If this is not controlled, then the very discussions that are expected to enable the team to successfully couple their technology with opportunities may become self-destructive or at best a negative capability (Leonard-Barton, 1992; Simpson *et al.*, 2002). The quest for consensus should not be a recipe for suppressing alternative and conflicting views. It is

therefore the responsibility of an ubuntu-minded project leader acting as a facilitator to consolidate ideas and streamline the evaluation orientation of the team towards relevant expectations. A project leaders understanding of the complexities of decisions by consensus, is in a good position to help direct the team's attention as to how their envisaged future can be realised. She may do this by continuously directing the team's vision, energy and efforts to find solutions to organizing challenges confronting the team. Thus, by virtue of being a leader with extensive experience and commanding respect, she acts as a mediator, bringing discussions on alternative pathways to a close at the appropriate time. Bringing discussions to a head and making a final decision which some team members might not find favourable can make them feel their ideas are not considered worthwhile. Clearly, an Ubuntu-minded team leader needs to be proactive at negotiating with proponents of alternative ideas to ensure they come to understand and appreciate why a particular choice is favoured over others.

## **Organising**

From an Ubuntu perspective, the role of the project leader in terms of organising encompasses regulating the effective participation of all team members, and integrating their skills, talent and creative potential in search for solutions to problems encountered in practice. This he or she may do by building up information on possible problems and playing an active role in the synthesis of alternative visions into coherent wholes and the allocation of resources to probe identified possibilities and limits. Given that strategic foresight emerges through the ongoing interactions, the project leader's role is to facilitate cross-pollination of ideas during such interactions by managing the relational dynamics of the team effectively. Organising here involves the nurturing and regulating of meaningful interaction among team members by structuring the team's activities as it works towards achieving its desirable future(s). This

activity can easily be caricatured as a stepping-stone to ‘concurrent seeing’ in the team, which may tend to undermine valuable gains from discussions. Nevertheless, we are of the firm belief that when individuals, through collective effort, come almost to agreement with one another, their discussions and interactions become particularly inviting fertile ground, and as such there is good reason to hope that the outcome of their discussions could lead to some form of pragmatic value.

Following the analytical scheme of Woods and Joyce (2002), Table 2 is presented as an activity-capability profile of project managers likely to foster the cultivation of strategic foresight in product innovation team. We make these analytical claims based on the project teams’ ways of organising themselves in their situated practice (Antaki, 1994).

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Our illustrative set of traits are not exhaustive, neither have they been empirically validated as encouraging the integration of Ubuntu as an organizing philosophy in everyday organizing of project teams. Rather they are meant to help us develop some conceptual clarity and a ‘predictive *fin-de-siècle* thinking’ about the potential activity –capability profile of Ubuntu inspired project team leaders in practice.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Our objective in this paper was to explore ways in which organizations could unleash the strategic foresight potential of their employees. From a practice-oriented social science approach, we transcended disciplinary boundaries to draw on ideas and insights from Ubuntu, an African humanistic philosophy to bring in a wider array of influences to the theory and practice of strategic foresight in organizing. Appropriating various dimensions of Ubuntu such as respect, positioning and relational pluralism, we showed how Ubuntu integrated into

everyday organizing could help unleash the strategic foresight potential of employees within their situated practice.

In developing our conceptual framework to show how Ubuntu allows the temporal migration of employees from a lower to a higher relational position in organizing, we specified how the organizing social relationships and interactions of lower level employees may encourage the enactment of intelligent actions, which may lead in turn to the cultivation of strategic foresight. From this perspective, the key contribution of this paper lies in narrowing the widening gap between the theory and practice of unleashing the strategic foresight potential of employees within the contingencies of everyday organizing. Furthermore, we have highlighted how Ubuntu inheres in the ability to allow ordinary organizational members to take responsibility of their joint enterprise, enact organizationally useful actions and repertoires that has the potential to improve the entrepreneurial capabilities of the organization. Crucial to this endeavour is improving our understanding of the skills and traits of team leaders in sustaining the spirit of Ubuntu among team members.

Although not anchored in data, we embarked on a speculative expedition to develop an our Ubuntu inspired activity-capability profile of team leaders, which we argue, has the potential to mobilise team members towards novel material and social transformations; entertain their imaginations as they attempt to explore, reconfigure and convert infinite possibilities, limits, potentialities and contingencies into resources and productive outcomes. In this regard, the activity-capability profile does not only show the possible influence of middle-level management staff in contributing, harnessing and unleashing the foresight potential of project team members; in addition, it also has ramifications for the selection of people to lead project teams. In this regard, our emphasis on Ubuntu helps us to move interest in African philosophy from the margins to the centre of management theorizing, and opens up new possibilities for re-thinking how the strategic foresight capability of employees could be cultivated.

Our organizing framework highlights potential opportunities for further theoretical and empirical inquiry into the possibility of integrating Ubuntu into an organization's processes. While further theoretical work may be needed to 'tighten' the framework, future research could go further to explicate and investigate prevailing organizing practices that have facilitate enable (or constrain) the integration of Ubuntu in organizing. We also advocate attention in future research to explore the underlying processes through which team leaders can improve their actions to inculcate Ubuntu ideals within their organizations.

Finally, we believe the influence of Ubuntu on the cultivation of strategic foresight needs to be understood not in terms of the balance sheet, but mainly in terms of the rate of adaptation of organizing routines, practices and processes in ways that lightens imagination and the about inarticulate social currents that may bring to life possibilities and potentialities in the realization of creative.

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**Table 1: Established approaches to cultivating strategic foresight**

Area of difference	Corporate foresight exercise	Practice approach to foresight
		Strategic foresight emerges out of organizing practices in context

<i>Broad theoretical assumption</i>	Strategic foresight as a derived outcome of ad hoc corporate futures exercises.	geared towards the creative evaluation and reconfiguration of sources of potentialities into present and future resources and productive outcomes.
<i>Primary emphasis</i>	Through the purposeful generation of plausible futures or heuristic narratives during futures exercises and scenario planning workshops.	Through strategic conversations, temporal reflexivity- in-practice, adaptive learning, prospective sense-making and improvisation within the contingency of the moment.
<i>Process characteristics</i>	Relies on the contribution of external consultants or futurists whose role is to facilitate the filtering and combination of information dispersed in time into meaningful, future-oriented knowledge.	Problematizes the use of external consultants. Strategic foresight in the form of strategizing emerges from everyday organizing practices that involve micro-interactions and the interpretation of subtle cues in practice.
<i>Organizing logic</i>	Rational episodic intervention organised around a framework of scientific rationality’.	Flexible, relational in context, and perpetually <i>becoming</i> -‘ongoing way of thinking in the organisation about the future.
<i>Limitation</i>	Often appear as an act of imposing dominant logic on subaltern groups, either through the truncation of alternative scenarios, or through an ideological understanding of outcomes.	Identifying organizing practices and activities that can be counted as partly constitutive of strategic foresight.

**Table 2**

<b>Slogans</b>	<b>English translation</b>
<i>Serti</i> <i>Shosholoza</i> <i>Simunye</i>	Unity with others Working as one, i.e. teamwork Unity is strength

*Muthu ubebelwa munwe  
Motho ke motho ka batho  
babany*

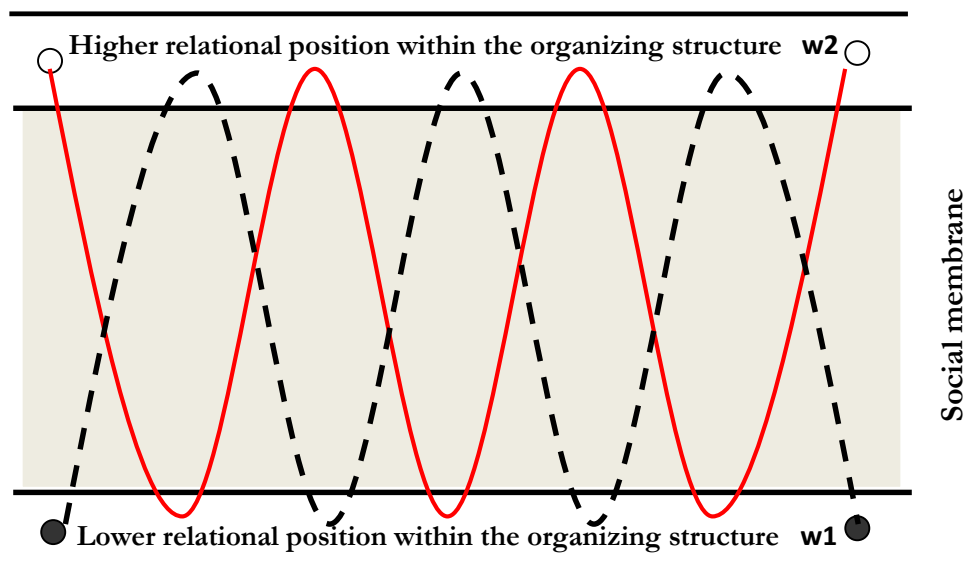
A person is born for the other  
It is through others that others attain selfhood

**Table 2: Activity-capability profile of Ubuntu minded project leaders**

<b>Strategic role</b>	<b>Focal micro-level activities</b>	<b>Personal capabilities</b>
<i>Learning</i>	-Providing spaces for creative thinking, boundary-less information sharing, and foster collaboration	-Personal reflections on the teams' working practices. -Active participation in strategic conversations
<i>Directing</i>	-Setting out clear strategic objectives with inputs from team the members. -Providing a platform for members to air their views on the innovation strategy.	-Encouraging others to freely test their assumptions under controlled conditions. -Facilitating constructive and rational dialogue when choosing between alternative pathways.
<i>Organising</i>	-Synthesis of multiple converging presents and alternative futures into pragmatic and coherent alternative pathways. -Mobilization of differential visions of team members before to taking new initiatives.	-Regulate the effective participation of team members by integrating their skills, talent and creative potential in search for solutions.

**Figure 1: Ubuntu inspired relational incumbency in project teams**





**Figure 2: The three pillars of ubuntu-minded project leader**

